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Winning in a New Business Environment

October 2007 (p.80) Written by Jim Pinto “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.”

That’s the well-known quote that exemplifies unfettered competitiveness—attributed to American football coach Vince Lombardi. Business too is a game against competitors on a global scale. Winning or losing can make a significant difference. Losing companies quickly disappear.

In his 1978 book, “The Gamesman,” Michael Maccoby describes four types of business personalities: Craftsman (or Artisan), Organizer, Jungle Fighter (or Warrior) and Gamesman. No individual is purely one type, but rather, includes a mixture depending on the circumstances and personalities. The Artisan values detailed analysis, skill and experience—typically engineers. The Organizer is most effective at developing policies and retaining the status quo—typically financial people. This type of person is needed in times of stability, but is often a big impediment to organizations that require courage to take risks in times of change. The Warrior is useful during times of turmoil, when tactical changes must be enforced and reductions in force become necessary. The Gamesman values strategic overviews and thrives on rapidly moving tactical changes. In today’s rapidly changing business environment, Gamesman strengths are most recruited for top-level positions.

Today’s business is a game on a global playing field. The players are not hourly-paid pawns, but sophisticated knowledge-workers who must be actively involved to win against fierce worldwide competition. Their motivations go beyond doing pre-defined tasks and receiving paychecks. They want to know the game-plan, to see how they can participate and contribute. They want to be challenged—to have fun.

Have fun

At Action Instruments, the employee-owned company I founded, we had a basic theme, “Let’s have some fun and make some money.” It’s important for businesses to have fun. All things being equal, it’s much more fun work in a business that makes money consistently. It’s an attitude that feeds on itself—the businesses that win have fun, and businesses that have fun tend to be winners.

Part of the confusion stems from the definition of “fun.” Many people equate fun with things that have little or nothing to do with work. It goes back to old factory paradigms—work was considered tedious and was enforced by a demanding “boss,” and so it was not fun. My definition of “fun” in business is allowing people to have the freedom and responsibility to do what it takes to win—not working for a task-master, who doles out predefined tasks, but participating in goal-setting, getting recognition and earning rewards for exceeding expectations. Those who are challenged to participate enjoy playing the game.

When tasks are simply doled out, people tend not to get involved. They don’t care enough to watch for changes in the game, to adapt. This is often where organization-driven managers

become frustrated; they don't trust the players and begin to rely on micro-management—which worsens the situation. By contrast, the Gamesman outlines the objectives, motivates the players to keep their “eye on the ball” and adapt to changing circumstances.

Is winning important? Yes, it's important. Everyone knows the score—they get disappointed when they lose and they're happy when they win. They see greater rewards and motivation when the company performs well, and success breeds success. Winners make goals achievable, with rewards tied to effort and team involvement.

Focus on creating a positive and productive business environment, help the individual players to flourish, have fun—and the wins will come.

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